



March 27, 2015

Dear Senators and Representatives:

Rebuilding America's Middle Class (RAMC) is a coalition of state and individual community college systems from across the country who share the common belief that community colleges are one of America's primary solutions to building a strong, more competitive workforce and therefore, a strong middle class.

As the President of RAMC, I am writing to seek your support for ensuring that no student is denied the ability to enroll and complete a community college education due to financial need. Even with the relatively low cost of our institutions, far too many students are unable to complete their degrees due to financial considerations that are often far beyond their control. Fortunately, the federal government already makes important investments, such as the Pell Grant program, which helps more than a third of low- and moderate-income community college students defray the cost of college. However, more must be done. That's why we urge you to support initiatives, such as the President's proposal to cover the tuition costs of a community college education for qualified students as well as the efforts of Congress to restore year-round Pell Grants.

The President's proposal would create a Federal/State partnership aimed at ensuring that low-income students have the resources necessary to cover the costs of community college tuition. If Congress fully funds this program, it would ensure that all those who are qualified would have access to a community college degree, a goal that would achieve enormous benefits for each of these students and our nation's economy as a whole. In our view, it's hard to imagine a better investment with a higher return for American taxpayers.

That said, we certainly are aware of the fiscal pressures facing this Congress, and if that means fully funding the President's proposal at this point is not possible, there are other important improvements that can be made to advance the important goal of increasing access to a community college degree for all Americans. There is tremendous bipartisan support for the restoration of year-round Pell Grants throughout Congress. This proposal would permit students to receive an additional Pell award to continue their studies during the summer months and other periods, and would greatly increase student completion in a shorter, less costly timeframe. The initial enactment of this proposal was cut short only a few years ago due to concerns about the fiscal impact, just as it was starting to show positive results at driving completion. The restoration of this proposal has bipartisan support in Congress and would dramatically ease the financial pressures on our students who are looking to complete their studies for a credential or degree.

Rhetorically, there is widespread agreement that strengthening community colleges is an assured way to provide a pathway to the middle class for millions of Americans. We appreciate the rhetorical support, but believe now is the time for action. The very best way to take action to improve college completion and increase affordability is to pass the President's community college proposal all or in part, and/or support the bipartisan year-round Pell proposal.

RAMC members stand ready to work with you on the fiscal challenges of enacting both of these approaches and we urge you to strongly consider these proposals as work on the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act begins this year. Thank you for considering our views.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Joe D. May". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "J" and "M".

Dr. Joe May  
President, RAMC  
Chancellor, Dallas County Community College District